

MINUTES
PENINSULA AND AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION
Held at Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room 2 and via MsTeams
Thursday, February 8, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Robin Tunnicliffe; Anita Bull; Linda Geggie; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist; Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning, Renee Cenerini, Saanich Parks, Recreation and Community Services; Bob Maxwell; Mike Doehnel; Shellie MacDonald, Haliburton Farms; Barry McLean; Jody Watson and Samantha Hammond, CRD (via Teams); Philippe Lucas, Peninsula BioSolids Coalition.

Regrets: Jenni Michell, Councillors De Vries, Paltiel and Marshall.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Katie Underwood: “That the Minutes of January 11, 2024 be adopted as circulated.”

CARRIED

CHAIR'S REPORT

- A few Metchosin councillors who attended PAAC's Farm Tour last summer are planning a duplicate tour for the Association of Vancouver Island Municipalities (AVIM) this April. They want a major focus on working farms and agritourism. Without PAAC's public engagement this AVIM tour likely would not have happened.
- The District of Metchosin is working on an Agricultural Plan and she is part of the team. Articles have been written for the local paper and collaborators and enthusiasts have come forward to offer resources and support.
- These two events, together with the newly formed South Island Farmers' Institute (SIFI) are creating a buzz and are bringing attention to some of the challenges faced by farmers.
- SIFI has introduced a Sustainers Series with monthly meetings that meets PAAC's mandate. She suggested that as PAAC has limited energy but has funds available, we continue to partner with SIFI this year to make education and agricultural awareness a priority.
- Another priority is reviewing our Terms of Reference. Two members have volunteered to be part of the review committee, anyone else is welcome to join. It has been 10 years since they were last reviewed.

REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES AND TREASURER'S REPORT – None present

SPEAKER'S BUREAU:

Peninsula Bio Solids Coalition – Land Application of Bio Solids

P. Lucas gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file). The following was noted in response to questions and committee discussion:

In response to questions from PAAC, P. Lucas stated:

- A ban on the land application of biosolids was issued in 2011 and it has not been overturned, so why are we continuing to produce biosolids at the Hartland Landfill?
- PAAC has previously submitted a letter opposing the application; however, if the Commission submitted another letter indicating its opposition, it would carry a lot of weight.

MOVED Anita Bull and Seconded by Katie Underwood: “That PAAC write a letter to the CRD and the Peninsula Biosolids Coalition reaffirming its position opposing the land application of biosolids.”

CARRIED

CORRESPONDENCE:

- a) **PAAC response to Planning regarding rezoning of a portion of land from A-1 to C1-R at 5550 West Saanich Road (Red Barn), and to allow for liquor sales.**

PAAC raised a few issues but had no objection to the application.

- b) **Appointment of Mike Doehnel to the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission**

MOVED by T. Michell and Seconded by D. Williamson: “That Michael Doehnel be appointed to the Peninsula Water Commission as the agricultural representative for a one year term.”

CARRIED

- c) **PAAC response to Farmlands Trust's (FLT) request for donation for 2024.** PAAC had agreed to provide seeds as a means of support; Members were asked to bring what seeds they have available, and Bob Maxwell, a member of the Trust, will deliver them. Robin will contact the FLT to see what variety of seeds they would like.

- d) **Letters from Saanich re PAAC Governance Review.** Noted that all four municipalities and the CRD have been invited to participate in the review. PAAC questioned why the CRD has been included when they are not an official member.

- e) **Saanich Referral: ALR Application for 4660 Elk Lake Drive (Wildwood Nurseries)**

- The A-3 rural zoned 1.5 acre ALR property currently operates as a nursery (farm market) and has for over 40 years. It has farm status according to the BCAA. The application is to exclude the property from the ALR. This is supported in the Royal Oak Local Area Plan, but not in the OCP policies* or the Saanich Agricultural and Food Security Plan.

*(*The Saanich OCP, Section 5.1.1 Agriculture and Food Security, Policy 2, page 5-5: “Do not support applications to exclude land from the Agricultural Land Reserve, unless: a qualified professional agrologist provides evidence that the property is incorrectly designated; and exclusion would not adversely affect the long term agricultural value of the adjoining land within the Reserve.”)*

- The property is isolated from other ALR properties, surrounded by a hotel, a recreation centre and a church – but that is not a valid reason to remove the property from ALR and its current use.
- The property currently meets the definition of farm use on agricultural land under the *ALC Act*, a farm operation under the *Farm Practices Protection Act*, and is currently classified as a farm by BC Assessment. Based on this, the rationale for exclusion

- was questioned.
- The Province has recently changed regulations – Bill 47: Housing Statutes (Transit-Oriented Areas) Amendment Act 2023 will require additional housing within a certain distance from a transit hub. There is a hub close by on Royal Oak Drive. We may see additional pressure for housing in this area.
 - PAACs mandate is to protect ALR land for farming and production. If the owner wishes to sell, it can still be used as a garden nursery or farm market, or the existing greenhouses on site could be used to grow produce. Vertical and container farming are also non-soil based options.

In Summary:

- PAAC does not support excluding the property at 4660 Elk Lake Drive from the ALR, and suggests that other farming options be explored: container or vertical farming, greenhouses.
- If the property is ultimately sold, some compensation to agriculture should be considered. Saanich's Agriculture and Food Security Plan mentions increasing the amount of ALR land. This property could be a vital link for regional food security, even considering there is no soil; there are many non-soil types of agriculture.

The Secretary to advise the Planning Department accordingly.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

Properties at 4400 and 4251 Blenkinsop Road: Permission to use the existing barns to rent for storage of recreational and non-farm vehicles. (*Minutes, March 2023*)

- Saanich Council recently considered the above applications and recommended sending them to the ALC for consideration without a recommendation or comment. This decision went against both the staff report and PAACs recommendations.
- Although the agrologist's report found the soil not arable, there are many agricultural uses for the barn rather than renting it for commercial storage. These reasons were clearly stated in PAACs March 23 letter to the Saanich Planner.
- Although we are sympathetic to the financial difficulties farmers are experiencing today, it is our mandate to protect farmland, look for creative ways to support agriculture and food security.
- It is a dangerous precedent to start allowing barns on ALR property to be used as a commercial venture.
- It was noted that if the application is approved by the ALC, the owners can apply for a Temporary Use Permit for 3 years; there is one 3-year extension, and after that the owners could apply for rezoning.
- Suggested that PAAC request to make a presentation to Saanich Council (and other Councils) to make them aware of the reasons behind PAAC's decisions to protect and maintain ALR lands.

The Chair offered to prepare a draft response to Saanich Council, providing the rationale for keeping the barns for farm use and will circulate to members for comment first.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Water update – Mike Doehnel

- Mike advised that agricultural water rates will be on the agenda for the next Water

- Commission meeting. The Commission is still working with the Consultant.
- The General Manager of Integrated Water Services proposed that the Saanich Peninsula Water Commission be folded into the CRD Regional Water Supply Commission. This could result in some efficiencies.
- The Saanich Peninsula Waste Water Commission will continue as is.
- \$40,000 has been set aside for the review. A report is expected in a few months.
- He will prepare a draft report on the issue.

b) South Island Farmers' Institute – Katie Underwood and Shellie McDonald

- The Farmer2Farmer Conference will be held on Thursday, February 15, at the Saanich Fairgrounds.
- Events start on Monday, February 13th with a full week of farm tours and workshops which include solar power, soils, and small engine repairs.
- There will be 12 different workshops on the 15th.
- Registration is required. Lunch is provided. The Cost is \$80 pp if you are a member and \$125 for non-members. Field days are \$10 pp.
- Most of the revenue will go to compensating the farmers for their time at the workshops.
- SIFI now has 75 members. It is hoped more will sign up at the F2F event.
- Dan Ireland was the speaker at last night's Sustainer Series and was well received.
- Four workshops on the Business Series were held in January.

c) CRD Goose Management Strategy

J. Watson and S. Hammond gave a presentation (PowerPoint on file). The following was noted in response to questions and committee discussion:

- Regarding the use of drones near the airport, a licence is required; the CRD is working with the company involved, who will take all the necessary safety steps.
- To date no counts have been conducted in remote areas like Jordan River or the Gulf Islands; this is where drones will be useful.
- They are hoping to hire more egg addlers (from First Nations as well) during the 3 month nesting period.
- Noah Broatman attends PAAC meetings on a regular basis and he will be given updates on the program.

PAAC was encouraged to reach out to either Jody or Samantha if they have any concerns or something to report.

d) CRD FOODLANDS ACCESS PROGRAM – Noah Broatman – Not Present

OTHER BUSINESS

a) **Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell** – nothing to report

b) **Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead**

- Link to sign up: https://agriservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236 newsletter will be published quarterly.
- Things are busy at the Ministry – water workshops, land and resource stewardship programs, climate change analog status.
- She is trying to access more funds for workshops for the Farmers' Institutes.

c) **Annual Report - Reminder to submit reports by March 15, 2024**

The Secretary will circulate copies of last year's reports to Linda Geggie, Terry and Jenni Michell, Mike Doehnel.

After discussions with the Chair, and in view of the fact that we are entering our 27th year, it was agreed to contact some of the past Chairs to get their perspective on what PAAC has contributed to the agricultural community over the years.

d) **Administrative Costs for 2023**

Copies of the 2023 Administration Costs for PAAC were made available to the commission. Invoices have been sent to the member municipalities for payment.

e) Farmers provided an update on how their farm operations are going this year.

UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

– Farmer2Farmer – Saanich Fairgrounds – February, 15, 2024

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 14, 2024 in Committee Room #2 at the Saanich Municipal Hall.

Robin Tunnicliffe, Chair

I hereby certify these minutes are accurate.

Isobel Hoffmann, Senior Committee Secretary